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ABSTRACT

The superintendent of Eugene, Oregon, public schools addressed the staff at the beginning of the 1977-78 academic year concerning issues of education in the United States and implications pertinent to local education. National issues discussed include the decline of confidence in education contrasted with evidence that the situation is getting better, and the tension between liberty and equality and the conviction that it is possible to achieve equality of educational opportunity without demanding a concomitant equality of results. Other views of national issues expressed are that changes in the family, youth, and community cannot be ignored by schools. In addition, the back-to-basics movement is commended for refocusing attention on the need to improve teaching and learning; however, it is also called a simplistic embrace of an uncomplicated curriculum. The importance of the scale of education is cited in efforts to maintain school-based management and the participation of school staffs and patrons in educational decisions. How these national concerns are relevant in local education is outlined in matters of curriculum, treatment of students, politics and governance, and special education. (MLF)

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REMARKS TO THE STAFF

by

Thomas W. Payzant
Superintendent

August 30, 1977

It has been a very good summer. With the commitment and help of you and many others in the community, the budget levy request was approved by the voters at the first election in June. Also, we have been free from the distractions of employee negotiations this summer. All of the collective bargaining contracts are now signed for the coming year. The board has been active this summer, too. It has completed work on a number of difficult issues such as grading, athletics, and food services.

While much was accomplished this summer, there was also time for rest and relaxation. I feel summer is a special time ... a time for reading, thinking, planning, and for enjoying the beautiful Oregon countryside. I did a good deal of this, and I hope each of you found time for some of these kinds of important summertime activities, too.

This summer as I reflected on last school year, it was easy to see that last year was by far the best year of the four that I have been here. It was a very good year. There were the usual controversies that swirled around the board and me, but across the district the tone of the year was positive. The distractions for teachers, students, and others who work in the schools were fewer than in the past. The tension of contract negotiations was absent. Unlike some of our neighbors, we did not have the uncertainty of an impending budget election and the possibility of school closure. As I visited

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schools during the year and talked with you, I noted a renewed interest in matters of curriculum, the instructional program, and the progress of students. In most schools the atmosphere was more calm and therefore more conducive to the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning.

I am optimistic that the spirit of accomplishment which you so well established in the schools last year will continue this year. Teachers, administrators, and classified personnel have participated in some very productive summer workshops and have fulfilled their summer work assignments enthusiastically. I expect this tone to continue in the months ahead and I am excited about it. There will be plenty of problems and undoubtedly some controversy, but I am convinced that whatever comes our way, together we have the intelligence, the skill, and the resources to give it meaning and make something of value of it.

This morning I want to speak to two different kinds of concerns. First, I want to consider some questions about education in America and then I will focus on several implications that I think are particularly pertinent for us in Eugene as we begin the 1977-78 school year.

Commitment to Education

There is a danger that the continuing talk about the public's retreat from its traditional commitment to and support for education will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. There are those who argue that a crisis in confidence is here and that the credibility of school people is at an all-time low. What is their evidence? First, some believe

that education is overpriced. The costs for public education continue to soar while enrollments decline. Nationally, the elementary school age population will continue to decline for the next five years, and the secondary school age population has now begun to decline. Second, some believe that standards have declined; that student achievement and the quality of education are dropping. In response to the question "Do you believe that a decline in national test scores of students in recent years means that the quality of education today is declining?" 59 percent of the respondents to the 1976 Gallup poll on education answered yes. Third, some believe that school people themselves have changed. Teachers and classified employees are unionized, administrators are often viewed as poor managers and unwilling to be accountable, and school board members are seen as too political. Educators no longer serve as the traditionally expected models of moral convention, especially as we become personally more involved with political and social issues. Finally, some people believe that schools as institutions are unnecessarily and unwisely caught up in social issues rather than basic education.

We know that other people's perception of reality cannot be ignored even when we judge reality to be different. However, I believe the situation is getting brighter. There is some evidence that confidence in education can be restored. A 1976 general social survey conducted by the National Research Center at the University of Chicago found 51.8 percent of the respondents saying too little is being spent on education, 38.4 percent saying about the right amount is being spent, and only 9.7 percent saying too much is being spent. Of the other categories, health, welfare, defense, natural environment and cities, only

health received a more favorable response than did education. Responses to another item on that survey showed that the confidence of the public in the people associated with institutions such as major companies, education, the executive branch of the federal government, congress, medicine, and the press is higher for education than for any of the others except medicine. On the Gallup poll question that elicited people's interpretation for the decline in test scores, the home, students themselves, television and general conditions of society shared the blame with teachers and the curriculum.

We cannot ignore the questions of commitment, support, credibility, and confidence. We must continue to demonstrate that our educational institutions are equal to the challenges of the times and can provide quality education. If our expectations fall, so will our performance.

Our past achievements have been remarkable. In 1901, 6.3 percent of the 17-year-old population graduated from high school; in 1975, 74.4 percent of this population graduated. The median for school years completed by persons 25 years old or over was 8.1 in 1910; 9.3 in 1950; 10.5 in 1960; and 12.3 in 1975. This accomplishment cannot be matched in any other country in the world. We must build on, not merely defend, our past achievements. We must demonstrate that a strong educational system will continue to support a creative and enlightened citizenry.

Tension Between Liberty and Equality

For 200 years our nation has experienced tension between liberty and equality. The founding fathers brilliantly developed a republican

government and federal system that found strength and balance in its paradoxes. Tom Paine, in the opening lines of Common Sense, wrote that "society is in every state a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one ... Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence." Henry Steele Commager in his new book, The Empire of Reason, points out that the most fundamental problem for our forefathers was "how to preserve liberty from the ravages of government." We, of course, daily confront questions requiring us to measure our own desires against the rights of the larger society that find their expression in government.

Can we maintain both liberty and equality? I think we can. The people of America continue to be more nearly equal than the people of almost any other land and our Bill of Rights timelessly sustains our commitment to liberty. Yet we cannot be smug. For example, we have still not reached the necessary goal of providing equal education opportunity for all children. In the absence of creative exercise of our liberties to do so, we have felt and will continue to feel the weight of federal and state government and the courts. Desegregation orders, affirmative action, Title IX, and Public Law 94-142 or The Education for All Handicapped Act are but a few examples. It is easy to view each new governmental intervention as a constraint on our individual liberty, but, if we do so, we all too easily forget our historical commitment and contemporary moral obligation to protect the individual rights of others.

Some people question whether we can achieve equality of educational opportunity without demanding a concomitant equality of results

that could sacrifice excellence and promote uninteresting homogeneity and stagnating conformity that strikes at this nation's fundamental commitment to individualism, diversity, and pluralism. I believe it is possible.

We are a results oriented people and it should not surprise us when we judge a concept such as equality by the actual results we observe rather than the opportunities we envision. For example, if culturally deprived children, after having been given equal opportunities, do not, over time, have more success in school, better access to jobs, and are able to participate in some of the qualitative aspects of life available to the culturally advantaged, we are not meeting our goal of providing equal opportunity. This does not mean results must be judged by the criterion of sameness. Jefferson recognized differences in people and talked about an aristocracy of talent, not an aristocracy of heredity. We can accept the paradox of liberty and equality and make creative use of the tension it produces. We cannot have one at the expense of the other. Likewise we cannot expect to have equality of results, that is, sameness, as the measure of equal opportunity. However, we do need change over time and we can at least strive to eliminate the grossest inequities in our society.

The Seduction of Conformity

Herman Hesse wrote, "Every human being is a unique individual. Any attempt to replace the personal conscience by a collective conscience does violence to the individual and is the first step toward totalitarianism." Hesse also wrote, "It is not our task to come

closer to one another any more than sun and moon or land and sea will ever meet. Our goal is to know one another, to see and learn, to revere the other for what he is; our own counterpart and complement." I am concerned about the preservation of our individuality at a time when the forces of conformity and homogeneity are strong in our land. We must further cultivate interest in options in education, open enrollment, alternative schools, and the expanding interest in lifelong education in order to continue to resist the powerful forces that can result in a national regression to the mean and the wave of mediocrity which can follow close behind.

The back-to-basics movement is welcome to the extent that it refocuses our attention on the need to improve teaching and learning in reading, computation, and writing; it is dangerous in its simplistic embrace of an uncomplicated curriculum that is intended to prepare the current generation for a future that will be more like a past, nostalgia notwithstanding, that will never again exist. Simplicity, homogeneity, conformity are seductive, but the pleasure and satisfaction derived from them are shortlived and history informs us that if we pursue them as our chief goals, we play a deadly game of follow-the-leader.

I believe that the medium of television should have our attention as a powerful force that perpetrates conformity at the expense of our individuality and as a potential challenge to our freedom. I have been impressed by the work on this subject of George Gerbner, Dean of the School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania. He mentions that television is not just another medium because it has absorbed the elements of all other media. He believes that television

has characteristics similar to the tribal religions of preindustrial society that defined the culture and dictated permissible behavior. It presents the elements of conventionality and unites the community by showing role stereotypes, explaining political issues, reinforcing the locus of power, and supplying entertainment. Television generates passive acceptance and commercial television becomes a powerful force resisting change and preserving the status quo.

If Gerbner is correct in his analysis, his work has important implications for us as educators. In the average American home today the television set will be on for six hours and 37 minutes. We know from research that there is a negative correlation between the hours of television watched and I.Q., school achievement in verbal skills, and educational aspirations. We need to raise questions about other skills, such as pictorial, perceptual, and aural skills that we have generally not taught. These skills perhaps are important to a child's general education and we should be seeking to understand them better. In addition, we should be teaching students to deal critically with television and to use it intelligently.

No doubt there is in television a strong national curriculum that teaches powerful social lessons. The issue of violence on television and the hypothesis that it results in an increase in agressive behavior in viewers may be the wrong focus. It is the false fear and insecurity that violence generates in millions of viewers that subtly suggests they will be victimized by the present condition of our society that is significant. A frightened population is one that will court conformity and thereby the danger of submitting to the control of others.

I believe that we must vigorously attack unquestioning conformity

and stress the importance of knowledge and ideas as the foundation of our curriculum. We cannot back away from a belief in ourselves as individuals who are capable of exercising influence over our fate. If we do, we deny our faith in the basic dignity of human beings. We must continue to ask ourselves how we are using our talents and for whom and we must urge our students to do the same. As people in many different capacities in schools who interact with children, we unwittingly teach what we are before we teach what we know.

Changes in Family and Youth

Substantial changes significant to educators are continuing to occur in the characteristics of family and youth. Some statistics randomly selected illustrate these changes. In 1976 one child in five was living with a single parent, while 85 percent of all white children were living with both parents. However, the rate of increase of single parent families is the same for whites and blacks. The percentage of children living in families whose annual income is below the poverty level has declined to 15 percent of the total, but the number of children in poverty households with female heads is increasing. In 1960, 5 percent of all births were out of wedlock. By 1976, in Washington, D.C., 50 percent of all births were out of wedlock and the number of abortions exceeded live births. More than 7.5 million children are now in day care. There is a striking decline in the amount of time parents spend in activities with children. The number of divorces where neither parent wants custody of the children increases yearly. For the 15-24 age group suicide is now the second leading cause of death.

Each generation of youth seems to be more precocious than the last. Puberty occurs earlier. There are changes in the premarital sexual behavior of the young. The rights of youth are interpreted by the courts to be similar to the rights of adults. For example, parents cannot deny the right of abortion to their daughter if she wants it. The voting age has been lowered and many states are lowering the drinking age. Despite this evidence that youth are moving toward adult status earlier in their chronological development, the gap between youth and adults seems to be widening. Several recent national commission studies of secondary education and the reform of secondary schools note with alarm that peer groups are increasingly the only reference point for the youth of the seventies. While the physical and social development of youth is accelerating, the society is not responding with work, leisure, community and political activities for youth that will result in satisfaction and responsibility.

It is clear that some critics of the schools would have us retreat from concern for and involvement with anything but academic subjects perhaps sprinkled with a touch of vocational education. The schools certainly must not be the testing ground for all experiments to resolve all social issues, but we cannot ignore the changing characteristics of the family and the youth we try to educate and still expect to meet individual needs and the expectations of diverse communities.

Community

Human beings from the beginning have formed communities based on

place, interest, values, religion, and the like. Confusion about these things and a lost sense of community have in recent years alienated all of us. We seem to be learning, and not without pain, that communities must be more than collections of people living in isolation doing their own thing. Lawrence A. Cremin in his recently published essay, Public Education, writes, "There must be ample room in a democratic society for a healthy individualism and a healthy pluralism, but that individualism and that pluralism must also partake of a continuing quest for community. In fact, individuality itself is only liberated and fully realized as the individual interacts with an ever widening variety of communities."

Cremin also calls for community institutions other than schools to begin to share more of the responsibility for education. Churches, businesses, media, farms, museums, universities, family, and others all have educational obligations and responsibilities. Schools, for their part, should operate less in isolation from other community institutions. Community members must "work through to certain agreements about values and policies [without doing] away with different life-styles and different beliefs, or with the educational institutions both public and private that keep those different life-styles and beliefs alive." Our educational institutions must be open to new ideas about community and participate in bringing them to life.

There is much to be learned by youth and adults in our quest for community, but educators should be cautious in their endorsement of learning based solely on subject matter, personal experience, or activities in the community. I agree with Daniel Bell who writes that experience is deceptive and one must organize it and select carefully

the relevant elements. These are activities that require a theoretical structure. What we call knowledge, then, is based on collective experience that may be made to reveal its essential theoretical structure.

It is exciting to think about education becoming a more integral part of the community. By better integrating education and the community there could be a balanced pursuit of "conceptual inquiry" and experience-based learning which would advance the acquisition of knowledge and the quality of life for people of all ages.

Scale

Last year I mentioned the powerful impact that Schumacher's book, Small is Beautiful had on me. His message is urgent. We must change our attitudes about scale. Bigger is no longer automatically better. The consumption ethic is not the only base for success and material well-being, but we seem to embrace consumption more fervently than ever. Perhaps our senses have been dulled somewhat in the past year. Record sales of big cars and gasoline consumption suggest so. A bitter winter without gas and heating oil in the Midwest and East is quickly but a memory in the record heat and drought of the present summer.

In the last decade we have seen cheap labor, cheap money, cheap energy, and rising enrollments replaced by expensive labor, devalued money, scarce energy, and declining enrollments. I am sure that the economy and education remain on a collision course and that our only hope is to find ways to soften the impact because we cannot expect to avoid the collision altogether. One possible cushion was suggested by John Pittenger, past commissioner of education in Pennsylvania. In a

recent Harvard Graduate School of Education Bulletin article, Pittenger deplores the establishment's love affair with school consolidation and centralization. Our board's decision last year to keep the small schools open in Eugene in the near future may appear in retrospect to be one of the most important decisions made in the school district in recent years.

Recently I have detected certain pressures to move us back to a more centralized school district organization. This would be at the expense of our efforts to maintain school-based management and the participation of school staffs and patrons in the many important educational decisions that are made at the local building level. I believe that these decisions should be made by you in the schools. I am convinced that this is in the best interest of children and I will continue to strongly resist any pressures to further centralize decision making in this district.

I want my support for smallness to be clearly understood, however. I do not propose disproportionately large allocations of resources to small schools as opposed to larger ones. There are some tradeoffs that may seem unfair by the consumption ethic, but more than compensate when qualitative standards are applied.

Our attitudes will determine whether we view the reallocation of scarce resources as a problem or an opportunity in pursuit of a new value that small can indeed be beautiful. Annie Dillard, in the moving book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, writes, "Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery, like the idle, carved tunnels of leaf miners on the face of a leaf. We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band

of darkness, or if it comes to that, choir the proper praise."

Leadership

We love our heroes and despise our villains; both have in their own time and place romantic appeal. But it is not the heroes and villains that are history; it is what they do or do not do with their lives and their impact on the lives of others that becomes our legacy for the future. We can be deceived by the style of our leaders. It is what they do and what they are, not what they say and how they look, that should be our focus. In our respective leadership roles we will do well to follow the admonition of Hesse who said, "Practice ought to be the consequence of thought, not the other way around." Our leaders for tomorrow in government, business, education and other institutions must know how to govern and be governed. They must be risk takers, motivated by challenge and competition, or gamesmen as Michael Maccoby terms them. They will be quite unlike the security seeking, other-directed, bureaucratic company people of the 1950's described in William Whyte's, The Organization Man and David Riseman's, The Lonely Crowd. But as Maccoby points out in his new book, The Gamesman, even this dynamic leader will not succeed unless he or she finds a way to merge the head with the heart. The separation of ambition and human feelings within an individual can render him or her unhappy and dangerous even as he or she succeeds.

In the time remaining I will turn my attention to Eugene and some challenges that will provide opportunities in the year ahead for us to exert leadership and improve education and the quality of life in our community.

Curriculum

In June, parent committees in each region completed a review of district curriculum goals and objectives and made recommendations for modifications. During the summer months the curriculum specialists, with the help of a teacher workshop group, have reviewed the work of the parent committees and prepared a report with recommendations for board action. One of our charges for the coming year will be to achieve the board's goal of identifying the discrepancies between curriculum goals and program practices and taking steps to eliminate them.

The elementary reading evaluation will be completed in December, and we will begin to formulate an evaluation design for math and writing. These activities are a response to a legitimate concern shared by many educators and lay people that we must do better in these curriculum areas. While this emphasis absorbs much of our time and energy, it should not be viewed as a retreat from a strong commitment to other areas of the curriculum. It may be necessary to trim from our curriculum smorgasbord some of the gourmet offerings, but we will continue to provide a balanced diet in all curriculum areas.

For ourselves I suggest a commitment to sharpening our own basic skills. I think these should include the following as defined by Bud Hodgkinson, past director of the National Institute for Education. Selective attention, the skill to eliminate extraneous factors as we face an issue is the first. The second is sustained analysis, or the skill of breaking a problem into its component parts for easy analysis. Third is analogizing, the skill of testing other known relationships to the problem before us. The fourth is suspending closure or the skill

of tolerating ambiguity. The final skill is autocensorship, the practice of testing a solution to a problem before affirming it. I intend to work to sharpen these basic skills in the year ahead. I invite you to join me.

Students

For years we have talked about individualized education. Often the individual has been lost because of our attention to the curriculum and program. During the past week or two most of the administrators have seen a very touching film, "Cipher in the Snow." I considered showing it to you today, but decided that it would be more meaningful to you seen and discussed in small groups at your schools. Teachers, cooks, custodians, secretaries ... all should see this film which starkly reminds us that no child can be forgotten. Just think if each district employee identifies one student who might otherwise be ignored this fall and gives that boy or girl something as inexpensive as a little extra attention, twenty-two hundred Eugene young people would have a wider and richer experience in our schools.

Politics and Governance

Cremin wrote in Public Education about the importance of politics and political process in education. He noted that our focus is often too narrow and directed to particular decisions. He wrote, "The debate over what knowledge, what values, what skills, and what sensibilities we might want to nurture in the young and how we might want to nurture them is more important than the particular decisions we happen to reach at any given time."

Controversial issues and conflict seem to generate spontaneous but sporadic involvement and demands for participation in decision making. It seems ironic that many of us still view conflict as negative and involvement in decision making as positive and fail to connect the two. Apathy should be our larger concern ... apathy in ourselves, in our students, in our community. We cannot expect our students to become skilled in citizen participation without modeling that participation for them. We cannot decry the trauma of conflict and politics from the sidelines in good conscience if we are unwilling to work within the political system to use conflict creatively to accomplish working goals. Young people need experiences which will help them learn the skills of negotiation, compromise, and other aspects of resolving conflicts. They also need experience in thinking about and debating the larger issues as well as working on particular decisions.

There is no one governance system that is appropriate for all times and every place. Direct democracy has its place as does representative democracy. Consensus decision making is often desirable but on occasion there is no substitute for a unilateral decision. As teachers we know this and tell this to our students. As parents we give the same message to our children, but in our adult relationships with other adults we easily forget. I believe we must work together to eradicate apathy through positive political action and through our participation in various forms of decision making. But we must also remember that sharing in making a decision means sharing in the responsibility for the consequences of it. That is our price of admission to the decision making arena.

Appraisal

I have chosen the word appraisal because it is more personalized than evaluation and assessment and it implies setting a value on ourselves, what we are doing, and the programs we participate in. I view appraisal, assessment, and evaluation as important tools as we search for the discrepancies between what is and what ought to be and then find ways to remove them. We must be careful to see that these tools never become ends in themselves. We must also continue to make the clear distinction between appraisal of programs and appraisal of people. The science of appraisal advances yearly, but we must remember that it can never totally replace the art of human judgment.

In the year ahead we must keep in mind the benefits of periodic self-appraisal and in so doing remember the important linkages between the physical and mental health of human beings. We cannot afford to be too busy to ignore our physical and mental health. Take time for physical exercise and intellectual stimulation. Each of us owes this much to ourselves. By selfishly reserving some time ... maybe 30 minutes or an hour each day for ourselves we will improve both our own sense of well-being and enrich our interactions and improve our effectiveness with others.

Special Education

The only program area to receive new funds in the 1977-78 budget is special education. This is the result of external pressure in the form of new state and federal legislation that requires school districts to provide equal educational opportunities for all handicapped

children. But beyond that it is the result of our own reassessment of priorities and the moral commitment of this school district to serve all handicapped children. We are now completing a special education plan to give us direction during the next few years for implementing programs to meet the needs of our handicapped children. The board is committed to take the dramatic steps necessary. Reaching our goal will take several years and each of us must provide support and help.

Making a Difference

Each of us here today ... bus driver, teacher, secretary, food service worker, administrator, maintenance worker ... can make a difference in the quality of education in Eugene and the quality of our own lives. You have demonstrated the will and ability to do so before and I look forward to working with you during the year ahead as each of us renews our commitment to make a difference in the lives of children. I want to end with another short passage from Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.

> "It is dire poverty indeed when a man is so malnourished and fatigued that he won't stoop to pick up a penny. But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days. It is that simple. What you see is what you get."